



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

helping people help the land

LANDOWNER PROFILE

"Every landowner should consider planting a hedgerow somewhere on his or her farm. Hedgerows keep soil on the banks of canals, shade the water, prevent weeds from becoming established and give habitat to wildlife."

— **John Anderson**

What He's Learned about Hedgerows

Over the years, John Anderson has learned quite a lot from planting and watching hedgerows on his farm. Four of the more important things he has learned:

- A well-designed perennial hedgerow will keep weeds out
- Wildlife populations will increase dramatically, from quail to reptiles to insects
- Hedgerows may harbor pest insects, but also a multitude of beneficial insects
- Count on pollinator numbers exploding. When the willow trees bloom in late January, you can hear them buzzing

California's hedgerow pioneer John Anderson thinks he has some very sound reasons why every landowner should consider planting a hedgerow somewhere on the farm. In his own case, he's planted the natural borders about everywhere he could put them.

For nearly 30 years, the veterinarian-turned native grassland seed producer has studied the effects of the hedgerows growing all across his 500-acre farm near Winters in Yolo County, Calif.

"I went to England in 1980 and saw all the wildlife associated with hedgerows there. I thought there shouldn't be any reason we couldn't be doing the same thing here in California," continued Anderson.

On the borders of land he was leasing to producers of tomatoes, melons, alfalfa, sunflowers, corn and wheat, he began planting complexes of native plants that mimic natural systems.

"We were probably the first in Yolo County to put these natural borders in," said Anderson. "The Soil Conservation Service and the Yolo County Resource Conservation District (RCD) were recommending them and we took them up on it."

Anderson guesses he has about five miles of hedgerows on the farm now, lining irrigation canals and ponds, dividing larger fields into smaller ones to protect them from the wind and beautifying roadsides - all the while providing habitat critical for hundreds of species of wildlife.

Multiple Canal Benefits

"There are a number of benefits to planting grasses, sedges and rushes along irrigation canals," said Anderson. "First, they stabilize the canals, keeping soil on the banks instead of washing into the bottom of the canal.



LIFE ON THE EDGE.
Anderson plants natural borders "just about anywhere I can." Native grasses, sedges and rushes along canals provide excellent habitat and keep weeds out.



They also shade the water, creating cooler water, which is a good thing all the way around. They also prevent weeds from becoming established on the canal edges, which reduces or eliminates the need for herbicide spraying.”

And, he’s a big fan of the habitat the hedgerows create for game birds including quail, dove, pheasants and



turkeys, as well as everything from snakes to mink and bobcats.

“We have more deer. Our combination of hedgerows and native grasses and forbs has also built our bird diversity tremendously,” said Anderson. “We have more than 120 bird species on our 500 acres, everything from warblers to raptors.”

He’s helping pollinators in a big way, too. “I learned from Bob Bugg at the University of California Davis that you want to do some farm-scaping that uses a combination of plants that offers a succession of flowering plants. That way you have something blooming, so you hear buzzing and singing all year long,” added Anderson.

60 Native Species

The mix of plants is not a problem for Anderson. He gradually switched from leasing his land for crops to growing seed for native grasses, sedges and forbs. A veterinarian by trade, he dabbled in growing natives for several years in the 1990s and then started getting serious about natives in 1996. He had converted a number of fields by 2000 and now grows about 60 different species of native grass, sedge and forb plants as his primary business. His native seeds have been selected and used for habitat restoration and re-vegetation throughout northern and central California.

Major buyers are government agencies - local, state and federal - for projects such as revegetating borders of wetlands, beautifying and creating habitat in roadsides

and improving water quality with plantings along streams and other bodies of water. The market for homeowners and rural landowners is also expanding. Native meadows eventually will overcome weed-dominated rural landscapes, Anderson believes.

What Anderson is doing is helping other people do the same things he’s doing on his own land. A network of dealers help supply the seed. Creeping wild rye and

NO CONTEST. (Below, L-R) Dan Efseaff, John Anderson and Phil Hogan check the habitat in one of Anderson’s hedgerows along a canal. The life-filled haven is in stark contrast to a barren canal across the road (left) with no hedgerow.



purple needlegrass are two of the biggest sellers.

“John is the restoration pioneer in California. It’s hard to imagine the accomplishments across the state being made without the work John has done,” says Yolo County RCD Executive Director Dan Efseaff. “It’s been interesting to see the landscape change in his area since 1999, not only what he’s done on his land, but what has occurred in the neighborhood.”

NRCS District Conservationist Phil Hogan agrees.

“There were no hedgerows out in that area at all in the 1970s. John’s battled criticism from some people on some ideas, but he’s passionate about conservation and will speak out for what he believes,” said Hogan. Hogan adds that hedgerows take little land out of agricultural production and are easily integrated into most existing farming operations.

Anderson offers tours of the farm by appointment. You can also get a virtual tour of the farm, and see a number of beautiful photos that show his grasses and hedgerows at work on the farm’s web site at: www.hedgerowfarms.com.